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# IFAS EXTENSION

**Friday's Feature**

**By**

**Theresa Friday**

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## **Timing is critical in the control of summer weeds**

Timing is everything in gardening. This is especially true when it comes to controlling weeds in your lawn. So, if you had a weed problem last summer, now is the time to apply a preemergence herbicide to control summer annual weeds.

Being late-February, any weeds that are growing in your yard at this time are probably winter weeds. They germinated last fall, remained small through mid-winter, and are now making rapid vegetative growth. Soon, they will begin flowering and going to seed, and will begin declining as hot weather arrives. The summer weeds, on the other hand, have not yet begun to germinate. So now is the time to get a head start on controlling bothersome summer weeds.

The first and best method of weed control begins with proper management practices that encourage a dense, thriving turf. Healthy turf shades the soil so sunlight can't reach weed seeds that are ready to germinate. A thick turf also minimizes the physical space available for weeds to become established. Proper mowing, fertilizing and watering will promote a healthy, dense grass.

If your lawn has a history of summer annual weeds, one control option is to apply a preemergence herbicide. Preemergence herbicides are applied before weed seed germination. If these chemicals are applied after weed emergence, they will have little or no effect. There is a narrow window of time when preemergence herbicides can be applied for maximum effect. If you wait too long to apply them, they will either damage your lawn or fail to work on the weeds.

Timing of a preemergence herbicide application for summer annual weeds such as crabgrass should be around March 1 or when day temperatures reach 65° to 70°F for four to five consecutive days. This generally coincides with the blooming of azaleas and dogwoods.

This is not true, however, for chamberbitter. Chamberbitter, that little mimosa-looking weed, requires warmer soil temperatures to germinate. Begin applying a preemergence herbicide around May 1<sup>st</sup> when battling this weed. If you wait until you see weeds, most preemergent type herbicides won't work. You must apply the product just before the seeds germinate.

Preemergence herbicides work by creating a chemical barrier in the soil/thatch layer. Therefore, uniform coverage with a preemergence herbicide, whether applied as a spray or granular, is necessary for optimum control. Large gaps in the herbicide-treated zone can result in weed escapes. In addition, adequate soil moisture before and after application is necessary to activate most preemergence herbicides.

Preemergence herbicides are generally effective in controlling weeds from six to twelve weeks following application. Most will begin to degrade when exposed to the environment. Therefore, to obtain season-long control, an additional application should follow six to nine weeks after the initial one.

Overuse of some types of preemergence herbicides can cause damage to your lawn. So, as is true with all pesticides, only apply the product if there is a pest to control – in this case, if you have had a history of summer annual weeds. Otherwise, save your money and time. It is the user's responsibility to read and follow all label directions and precautions when using any pesticide, including herbicides.

Some preemergence herbicides to look for include dithiopyr (Sta-Green Crab-Ex Crabgrass Preventer); oryzalin (Surflan) or pendimethalin (Lesco PRE-M or Scotts HALTS Crabgrass Preventer).

For additional information on lawn weeds, go to <http://turf.ufl.edu>, click on “Residential Landscapes” and then click on “Weed Management.”

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>